



# Spelman College Sisters Chapel Sisters Center For WISDOM

## Race, Gender and the Politics of Calling: A Womanist Approach to Vocation

Vocation In Undergraduate Education Conference  
March 13, 2009

Dr. Sherry L. Turner, Vice President for Student Affairs  
Reverend Dr. Lisa D. Rhodes, Dean of the Chapel

# Spelman College

## History, Mission and Socio-Historical Context

*An outstanding historically Black college for women, Spelman promotes academic excellence in the liberal arts, and develops the intellectual, ethical, and leadership potential of its students. Spelman seeks to empower the total person who appreciates the many cultures of the world and commits to positive social change.*

- Missionary origins (though currently non-religiously affiliated)
- Commitment to educating freed women slaves in the South
- Commitment to community service and positive social change
- Commitment to educating women for leadership
  - Greater exposure to female mentors and role models
  - Greater opportunities for and participation in student leadership
  - Higher percentage of women enrolled in traditionally male disciplines

# WISDOM Center

## Women In Spiritual Discernment of Ministry

- Vocational Program Models
  - Emanate from the Spelman College mission
  - Are culturally relevant and gender specific
  - Emphasize vocational reflections on womanism
- Womanism:
  - Is a theoretical approach conceptualized by Alice Walker
  - Is rooted in the social, political, historical and lived realities of Black women and other women of color
  - Acknowledges and seeks to dismantle multiple systems of oppression (racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, etc.)
  - Is a framework for empowering Black women to see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith

# Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center Programs

## Faculty, Staff and Curriculum Development

### Course Faculty Development

- *Human Rights & Conflict Resolution*, Tinaz Pavri, Associate Professor of Political Science and Chair, International Affairs Program
- *Black Women, Spirituality and Activism*, Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown, Associate Professor of English

### Faculty Development

- *Contemplative Teaching* – an on-line course taken by Veta Goler, Associate Professor and Chair, Drama and Dance

### Research and Travel Grants

- *Performing the 'Mektoub,' Voices from North Africa, the North African Diaspora and the Greater Arab Diaspora on Trauma and Memory*, Soraya Mekerta, Associate Professor of French and Francophone Studies
- Aspen Institute Fall Retreat, *Unlocking the Book in You*, Renita Mathis, Associate Director, Public Relations and Communications
- *Gloreita Christian Writer's Conference: Discovering the Passion the Power, and Purpose of Writing for Spiritual Renewal*, Angela Wood, Web Content Manager and Editor

# Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center Programs

## *2006 Global Conference: Sisters of African Descent Connecting Spirituality, Religion and Vocation*

### Objectives

- To expand the research on women of African descent, religion, spirituality and vocation by Black women scholars
- To engage women of African descent in theological conversation and research about vocation
- To document strategies to improve the opportunities for Black women clergy to serve in senior religious leadership positions

# Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center Programs

*“I’ve gotten away from the old me  
so I have been left to create and find a new me.”*

## Signature Student Development Programs

### Daughters of the Covenant Mentoring and Leadership Development

- 25 Student Leaders
- 15 Leadership Development Sites including
  - Zion Hill Community Development Corporation
  - Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church
  - Callwood Medical Center
  - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
  - Aid to Children of Imprisoned Mothers

# Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center Programs

Signature Student Development Programs

Interfaith Living and Learning Residential Community

60 WISDOM Residents

- Muslim
- Hebrew Israelite
- Protestant
- Spiritual but not religious

Bi-monthly Small Group Reflection

Weekly Spiritual Practices

*A Sacred Calling Vocational Manual*

# Signature Student Development Programs

## Signature Student Development Programs

Sisters Chapel Scholars

16 Covenant Scholars

15 Research Papers including

- Career vs Calling: An Examination of the Factors Affecting African American Women in Spiritual Vocations
- Womanism Is As Our Daughters Know
- Spiritual Fire Reclaiming Our Stories, Resurrecting Our Bodies, and Mothering Our Daughters: African American Women's Reproductive Struggles
- A Mirror for the Martyrs: Women of Color in the U.S. Mennonite Church
- Breaking Through the Silence and Shame: A Christian Modality of Healing From Child Sexual Abuse

# Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center Program Outcomes

- Increase in number of women choosing to major and minor in religion
- Increase in number of women pursuing theological education
- Increase in number of women seeking pulpit ministry
- Increase in the body of knowledge relative to research and scholarship on vocation, religion, spirituality and faith by Black women scholars

# Race, Gender and the Politics of Calling

## Focus Group

### Spelman College Alumnae (n=4)

- Second year Master of Divinity graduate
- Third year divinity school student
- Second year seminary student (non-traditional student)
- Entering first year of divinity school

### Current WISDOM Center participants (n=4)

- One graduating senior
- Three sophomores

# Race, Gender and the Politics of Calling

Highlights from focus group conversations.  
To review a segment of the video clip go to  
[www.spelman.edu](http://www.spelman.edu).

# Lessons Learned

*“I haven’t seen what I want to be.”*

- Race and Gender Matter
  - Being Black and female are central to women’s self-perceptions and perceptions of how others treat them
  - Subjective experiences of racism and sexism are salient to Black women
  - Being Black and female shape women’s perceptions of their call
- Characteristics of Black Women’s Struggle
  - Black women experience institutional, patriarchal oppressive structures
  - Black women’s own internalized oppression should be acknowledged

# Lessons Learned

*"I haven't seen what I want to be."*

- Resources and Opportunities
  - Spiritual autobiography
  - Diverse readings on vocation, Black womanhood and authentic selfhood
  - Exposure to female mentors and role models
  - Opportunities for student leadership
  - Opportunities and space for prayer, meditation and reflection
- Resistance, Agency and Creativity in Creating One's Own Space
- Recommendations